Christian Family Values

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We hear a lot these days about family values. The *Christian Right* has made this such an issue that political candidates have been conditioned to believe that mentioning family values frequently in their campaign speeches is an easy way to score points with voters. Of course, if a candidate also associates *"family values"* with the so-called biblical principles on which our country was founded, he is certain to score even more points with the *Christian Right*. It has become a cheap way to get votes.

The duplicity of this political tactic is twofold:

(1) Our country was not founded on *"biblical principles"*, and

(2) The *"family values"* found in the Bible are completely contrary to what the religious right supposedly stands for.

One has only to read unbiased histories of the Revolutionary War period to learn that the so-called founding fathers of our country were steeply entrenched in Deistic philosophy and, even in some cases, openly hostile to Christianity, and if some of those in Christian fundamentalist groups would just dust off their Bibles and actually read them for a change, they might be horrified at the type of *"family values"* they would encounter on the pages of their inspired word of God.

Let's take the family of Abraham as an example. This man was considered to be the father of all the faithful (Rom. 4:16-17), and both he and his wife Sarah were listed among the great heroes of

faith in Hebrews 11:8-12. So how did they measure up in terms of the type of family values that the *Christian Right* claims to stand for? Not very well, it seems. In Genesis 16, we learn that Abraham and Sarah, after struggling with the problem of Sarah's infertility, solved it by having Abraham impregnate Sarah's handmaiden Hagar (vs: 2-4). As a result, Hagar gave birth to Abraham's first son, Ishmael (v:15).

Now let's suppose that the religious right should learn that a political candidate whose wife was infertile had impregnated his wife's maid in order to have children. Would such a man be considered worthy of endorsement by the Christian Coalition? If news of his private life became public knowledge, it would probably end his public career, but a biblical character who did this very thing has been lauded for thousands of years as a great hero of faith. Go figure.

It gets even worse. After Hagar became pregnant, she despised Sarah for having given her to Abraham, so this caused friction in the family. When Sarah complained to Abraham, he said, *"Your maid is in your hand; do with her as you please"* (v:6). Say what! A man impregnated a servant and then told his wife to do with her whatever the wife wanted. How's that for family values?

What Sarah pleased to do was deal with Hagar so harshly that Hagar finally fled from Sarah's presence (v:8). In the wilderness that she had fled into, Hagar encountered Yahweh (as people routinely did in those days), and he advised her to return to Sarah

and submit to her (v: 9). In other words, Yahweh's advice was for Hagar to go home and eat dirt. It's called "*family values*."

After Sarah had borne her own son Isaac, the conflict between Hagar and her intensified, and Sarah asked Abraham to *"cast out the handmaiden and her son"* (Gen 21:10). To Abraham's credit the request grieved him *"because of his son"* (v:11), but apparently Yahweh wasn't so easily distressed. He told Abraham to listen to whatever Sarah had said to him (v:12), and so Abraham rose early the next morning, gave bread and a bottle of water to Hagar, and sent her and the boy away (v:14). Another triumph for family values, biblical style!

Now let's imagine this story in a modern setting (if it is at all possible to do so). Our hypothetical political candidate (a champion of family values, of course) after impregnating his wife's maid, advises his wife to deal with her jealousy in whatever way she wishes, and so the wife treats the maid in such a way that she runs away and puts herself into a situation that endangers both her and her unborn child. Then when the maid returns home submissively and finally gives birth to her baby, the wife orders her husband to throw the maid and her child out to survive the best way they can. Such a scenario would reduce some of the complaints that the *Christian Right* makes about the morality of Bill and Hillary Clinton to mere trivialities.

If their treatment of Hagar and Ishmael had been the only flaw in the moral character of Abraham and Sarah, we could overlook

it. After all, no one is perfect. The biblical saga of Abraham and Sarah, however, indicates other flaws in their character that can hardly be considered "*family values*" that civilized people would want to emulate. Genesis 12:10-20 records a famine in the land that forced Abraham and Sarah to go into Egypt. Sarah, it seems, was such a raving beauty that Abraham feared the Egyptians would kill him in order to get her, so a plan was devised. He asked Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister so that his life would not be in jeopardy while they were in Egypt (v:13). This was apparently what they told the Egyptians, and, sure enough, Sarah's beauty was immediately recognized. The princes of Egypt commended her to Pharaoh, who took her into his palace and rewarded Abraham with sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and female servants (vs: 14-16).

What a paragon of virtue! Here is a biblical hero of faith who concocted a lie about his relationship to his wife and then, to put it bluntly, pimped her to the king of Egypt for flocks and herds and female servants. In the case of Hagar, we have an example of how Abraham treated his female servants, so we can well imagine that if any truth is in this story, Abraham didn't lack for female companionship while Sarah was cavorting in the palace with Pharaoh. In today's society, Abraham and Sarah would be called "*swingers*". Is this the kind of "*family values*" that the religious right wants our country to practice?

Christian fundamentalists will no doubt quibble that

technically Abraham and Sarah didn't lie when they said that she was his sister, because she was biologically Abraham's half-sister (Gen. 20:12), but intention is the primary factor in determining if a statement is a lie, and Abraham and Sarah had clearly conspired to deceive the Egyptians about their relationship. If that isn't lying, what is?

But there were other questionable escapades in the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis 20, we learn that Abraham and Sarah pulled this same trick again, this time on Abimelech, the king of Gerar. The results were pretty much the same. Abimelech learned that Sarah was really Abraham's wife and returned her to Abraham with a reprimand for their deception. Nevertheless, they again came out of the deal smelling like a rose. Abimelech gave Abraham sheep, oxen, and servants and gave Sarah a thousand pieces of silver. Family values paid rather handsomely in those days.

Part 2

In our first article on family values, we left Abraham and Sarah in Gerar collecting the proceeds from Abraham's second attempt to pass Sarah off as his sister. Each time, she caught the eye of a king, and each time Abraham was given sheep and oxen and servants, both male and female, but the second time King Abimelech gave him a thousand pieces of silver as a *"covering of the eyes to all that are with you"* (Gen. 20:16). Hmmm, it sounds a lot like hush money, doesn't it? But such was the way of *"family*

values" in those days.

By and by, Abraham and Sarah had a child of their own if one can believe that a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman (Gen. 17:17) could become parents, but why not? Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), and the passage just referred to claimed that Sarah was 10 years younger than Abraham. Therefore, when they went into Egypt, where pharaoh took Sarah into his palace, she had to have been at least 65 years old (if there is any truth to the Bible record). So if Sarah was such a raving beauty at 65 that kings lusted over her, why not believe that she could bear a child when she was 90?

Anyway, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah, and when he grew up, they betrothed him to Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham's brother (Gen. 24:15). That's the way it was done in those days. Brother married sister; cousin married cousin. As noted in *"Jacob an Old Geezer?"* (pp. 7-9, this issue), Isaac's and Rebekah's son Jacob, the offspring of first cousins, even married the daughters of Rebekah's brother Laban. (Maybe it was all of this inbreeding that made these people think that they were always seeing God.) At any rate, Isaac and Rebekah married, after which we find in the Bible a story that illustrates the old like-father-like-son adage, only in this case, it was a matter of like father and mother, like son and daughter-in-law, because Isaac and Rebekah pulled the same trick that Ma and Pa did. Not only that, they did it in Gerar, the same place where Abraham and

Sarah had pulled the wool over Abimelech's eyes. In fact, Abimelech was still king, even though it had to have been at least 40 years later, because Isaac had not been born yet when Abraham and Sarah were in Gerar, and Isaac didn't marry Rebekah until he was 40 (Gen. 25:20). Anyway, Isaac and Rebekah went to Gerar, and *"when the men of the place asked him of his wife, he said, 'She is my sister', for he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife,' because he thought, 'Lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold'"* (Gen. 26:7). Yes, indeed, beauty was definitely a genetic trait in this family. After all, if Sarah was Abraham's sister, then Sarah was Rebekah's aunt. So isn't it quite believable that both women could have had beauty that men would kill for? At least, Abraham and Isaac thought so.

Apparently Abimelech didn't learn a thing from his experience with Abraham and Sarah, because he bought the same lie from their son and daughter-in-law. Oh, well, since it was at least 40 years later, maybe the guy was getting senile. At least, he didn't make a play for Rebekah himself, but he did believe Isaac's lie until one day he looked out the window and saw Isaac sporting with Rebekah (v: 8). Hmmm, Isaac was "*sporting*" with Rebekah in a place public enough that the king could see them from a window? Is that any kind of example in family values for the promised seed of Abraham to be setting for all generations to read about?

There has been a lot of debate over what Isaac's *"sporting with Rebekah"* meant. Some think that it meant... uh, well, that they were '*doing it'* right in public, but others argue that they were only *"displaying affection"*. Whatever they were doing, it was enough for King Abimelech to guess that they were married (v: 9), so it had to have been more than just a hug or a kiss. Anyway, if kids today want an appropriate response to parents and other adults who criticize them for "*making out*" in public, they can just point to this story and say, *"What's the big deal? We're just practicing old-fashioned family values that we read about in the Bible."*

So Abimelech called Isaac before him, just as he had summoned his father years before, and raked him over the coals for having lied about his relationship to Rebekah. *"What is this you have done to us?"* he said. *"One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us"* (v: 10). He then warned his people that anyone who touched Rebekah would surely be put to death (v: 11). There is no explanation for why a king who kept concubines in his palace would have thought it so tragic if some of the men of the country had "lain" with Rebekah

Times had changed somewhat since Abraham's and Sarah's sojourn in Gerar, because there is no indication in the story that Abimelech gave any goodies to Isaac as he had to his father Abraham. Maybe he felt that he didn't need to; after all, he hadn't

made a direct play for Rebekah as he had for her mother-in-law/aunt Sarah. Age is a terrible curse!

Isaac and Rebekah didn't exactly wind up empty-handed, though, because Isaac *"sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold, and Yahweh blessed him"* (v: 12). So the moral of this story seems to be that in those times when Yahweh routinely visited and chatted with his chosen ones, if they lied and "*sported*" in public, he would bless them with prosperity. Perhaps Christians, who go about preaching a need to return to biblical values, should not be surprised that bribery and sex scandals so frequently disgrace our public officials. Maybe they are just doing what they so often hear from the *Christian Right* and are making an honest effort to return to the family values of biblical times.

In due time, Isaac and Rebekah had children too, although it took them 20 years (Gen. 25:26). Twin sons (Esau and Jacob) were born to Rebekah, and right away problems developed between the brothers that make ordinary sibling rivalry seem like brotherly love. The fault wasn't really the children's, because Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). Parents today might keep this in mind. If they want to return to those wonderful family values of yesteryears, they must show favoritism to their children. It's the biblical way.

The sibling rivalry culminated one day when Esau came in from the field exhausted with hunger. Jacob, who had prepared pottage, refused to give his brother any until Esau vowed to give

up his primogenitive rights (acquired by being the firstborn of the twins). Faint with hunger, Esau agreed to the demand in order to get food from Jacob (Gen. 25:27-34). This was a supreme manifestation of brotherly love biblical style.

Rebekah, who loved Jacob, wanted to make sure that he retained the birthright that Esau had relinquished, so she conspired to disguise Jacob as his hairy brother Esau in order to deceive Isaac (whose eyesight was now failing) into pronouncing the blessing of the firstborn on him. This involved killing two goat kids to prepare a sumptuous meal for Isaac. Two kids? Isaac must have been hungrier that day than Esau ever was. Anyway, Rebekah took some of Esau's clothing and put it on Jacob so that he would smell like his brother, and then put the goat skins on Jacob's hands and neck (Gen. 27:15-17). To make a long story short, when Isaac smelled Jacob and felt the goat skins on his hands and neck, the poor old guy thought that Jacob was his hairy brother Esau and pronounced upon him the blessing. If Isaac couldn't tell the difference in feeling goat skins and a hairy human body, his eyesight must not have been the only thing that was failing. Anyway, that's how the story is told in God's inspired word, so it must be true. The lesson for us is that conspiracy, deception, and lying were very much a part of family values in biblical times. Many Christians today seem to be following this example only too well.

When Esau learned what had been done, he vowed that when

his father was dead, he was going to kill his brother. Boy, talk about biblical family values! Rebekah heard of this (how is anybody's guess) and arranged for Jacob to go visit her brother in Paddanaram. By this time, Esau had married two Hittite women, who were *"a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah"* (Gen. 26:35). Ah, so we see that ethnic prejudice was also a family value in biblical times, as was polygamy too, of course. Anyway, Rebekah used this as an excuse to get Jacob out of the country and away from Esau. She said to Isaac, *"I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"* (27:47) That's the spirit, Becky; show contempt for all who are not as ethnically pure as you. It's the biblical way.

Once this idea had been put into Isaac's head, he too became concerned. He called Jacob into him and said, *"You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddanaram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother"* (28:1-2). So Jacob went to Paddanaram and engaged in the sexual escapades described in *"Jacob an Old Geezer?"*. If Isaac, Rebekah, and their two sons were living today, psychologists would call them a dysfunctional family. But don't knock it; that's just the way family values were in biblical times.

Part 3

Our last quest for biblical family values left us contemplating

the public promiscuity, deception, sibling rivalry, parental favoritism, and ethnic prejudice of the family of Isaac and Rebekah. When we left them, Rebekah, fearing that her favorite son Jacob might be killed by his twin brother Esau for having cheated him out of his birthright, had convinced her husband Isaac to send Jacob to live with her brother Laban in Paddanaram, ostensibly to look for a wife among the daughters of Laban but actually to protect him from Esau, who had threatened to kill him.

We find, then, that half-truths were evidently a part of family values in biblical times, for in telling Isaac that her life would be ruined if Jacob married *"a wife of the daughters of Canaan"* as Esau had done (Gen. 27:46), Rebekah wasn't actually telling a lie, because Esau's Hittite wives had been *"a grief of mind"* to her (Gen. 26:35), but she used this truth only to conceal her real motives. She didn't want Esau to kill Jacob, and she didn't want Isaac to know about the family rift that her own deception and favoritism to Jacob had precipitated.

By the way, we should notice in passing that when Esau *"saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac",* he went to Ishmael (his father's half-brother whom Abraham had sired during his escapade with Sarah's handmaid Hagar) and took Ishmael's daughter Mahalath as another wife *"in addition to the wives he had"* (Gen. 28:8-9). Spite, then, seemed to be another "*family value*" in biblical times, as was also polygamy, which will be addressed later.

Anyway, Isaac sent Jacob to Paddanaram, where he had the various sexual adventures discussed in *"Jacob an Old Geezer?"* (*TSR*, November/December 1996, pp. 8-9,11). From this tale, of course, we can only conclude that polygamy was a family value in those days, because Jacob didn't just marry the two sisters, Leah and Rachel, but also accepted their handmaids as concubines with whom he sired four sons. The fact that Yahweh selected Jacob's sons born of these polygamous relationships to be the tribal heads of his specially "chosen people" must mean that Yahweh didn't consider polygamy to be morally improper. In fact, Yahweh's approval of Jacob's cozy little arrangement was at least implied where the Bible declares that *"God remembered Rachel"*, who until this time had been unable to bear children, *"and opened her womb"* (Gen. 30:22). Prior to this, Leah had experienced temporary sterility (a contributing factor to the duel of the handmaids, as each sister tried to outdo the other by producing children through their handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah), and *"God hearkened to Leah"* and ended her sterility (v:18). Apparently, it never occurred to the rivaling sisters that at least part of their "*sterility*" problems was surely due to spreading the sexual activities of an 85-year-old husband a bit too thin by having him try to sire children by four different women, but who are we to question the inspired word of God? If it says that God hearkened to Leah and Rachel and opened their wombs, then they must have been genuinely sterile, and God must have intervened

to remove their sterility. In so doing, God was surely conveying that he didn't see anything wrong with Jacob's cozy little setup and that he even encouraged it by intervening to have the arrangement produce children to become the fathers of his specially chosen people.

Jacob's little love nest in Paddanaram comes about as close to "free love" without actually crossing the line as one can imagine, but the sexual part of Jacob's family life isn't the only "*value*" that we should look at. During Leah's and Rachel's rivalry for their husband's sexual attention, Leah's eldest son Reuben *"found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah"* (Gen. 30:14), and Rachel asked Leah for some of the mandrakes. "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband?" Leah responded. "Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel then struck a deal with Leah. She would give up her sexual turn with Jacob that night in exchange for some of the mandrakes (v:15). So when Jacob came home from the field, Leah went out to meet him and said, *"You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes"*. And so Jacob *"lay with her that night"* (v:16). There always seemed to be plenty of Jacob to go around.

Jacob's sexual prowess, in fact, must have been something indeed. Usually men are the ones who are willing to pay for sexual favors, but even after the 85-year-old Jacob had spent a whole day working in the field, at least one woman in his life was

willing to pay for his stud services. At any rate, this deal that Leah struck with Rachel warrants our attention. Mandrakes of the Mediterranean region produced a narcotic effect when they were eaten, and even as late as the Middle Ages, they were used to dull sensitivities in patients undergoing surgical procedures. Mandrakes belong to the family of plants known as *Solanaceae* (sometimes called *Nightshade*), and although some of them are popular food plants, many of them, such as jimsonweed, tobacco, morning glory, and mandrake, are sources of powerful and even dangerous drugs.

The mandrake was also superstitiously considered both an aphrodisiac and a charm for pregnancy, so considering the competition for Jacob's sexual attention that dominates the story of his sojourn in Paddanaram, the Genesis writer may have intended readers to understand that Leah and Rachel were using mandrakes as aphrodisiacs or pregnancy charms. Nevertheless, their use for either purpose would have required that they be consumed, and so the sisters still would have experienced the narcotic properties of the mandrakes. In effect, then, Leah and Rachel transacted a drug deal, and those who clamor in today's society for a return to biblical family values would soundly condemn parents who use and traffic in drugs. In Bible classes, however, they honor Leah and Rachel as the mothers of God's chosen people, apparently never recognizing the inconsistency.

Like mother, like son proved to be true in the case of Jacob's

relationships with his children, for as his mother Rebekah had shown favoritism to him, Jacob had a favorite son whom he *"loved more than all his children"* (Gen. 37:3). This was Joseph, of course, whose favored treatment by his father caused such jealousy in his brothers that they threw him into a pit, waited for a caravan of traders to come by, sold him into slavery (vs:23-28), and then dipped Joseph's tunic in goat's blood to make it appear that he had been devoured by wild animals (vs:31-33). What we find in the Bible, then, are three successive patriarchal families that showed favoritism to certain ones of their children. Abraham favored Isaac over Ishmael, Rebekah favored Jacob over Esau, and Jacob favored Joseph over all of his children. It seems safe to conclude, then, that parental favoritism was very much a part of *"traditional family values"* in biblical times, but for some reason we don't hear Christians advocating it today. They seem to be lost in a sort of biblical limbo, wanting on the one hand a return to family values of biblical times but on the other hand not wanting a return to those biblical values that time and experience tell them are really not good ideas.

Part 4

The *Christian Right* touts the need for biblical family values in modern society, but when the lives of famous biblical characters are examined, as was done in previous articles in this series, we quickly see that they were not the kind of role models that most parents today would like for their children to emulate. Abraham,

Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob were all listed in Hebrews 11 as great *"heroes of faith",* but their individual stories in the Old Testament depict them as people who lied and practiced various other types of deception, who granted sexual favors for personal gain and sometimes engaged in polygamous relationships, who showed favoritism to their children, and did many other things that no decent family today would consider morality worthy of emulation.

This series would have to be continued indefinitely in order to examine the personal lives of all of the biblical characters whom Christians consider great servants of their god, so this final installment in the series will summarize only the *"family values"* of other notables whom the writer of Hebrews also listed as heroes of faith.

"By faith, Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7). In Genesis 6:9, Noah was described as a *"righteous man",* who was *"perfect in his generation",* so one would think that if any biblical character was worthy of imitation, certainly this man who was chosen of God to save human life from extinction would be the one. But one of Noah's first activities recorded after the flood was the planting of a vineyard, whose produce was used to make wine. Noah consumed so much of the wine that he became drunk and lay naked in a drunken stupor in his tent. When he later learned that his son Ham had seen him naked, he pronounced a

curse upon Ham's descendants (Gen. 9:20-27). There just wasn't very much in the character of this man to admire.

"And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me if I tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword..." (Heb. 11:32-34). The Bible may attribute such deeds as these to some of these men, but it also attributes to them some deeds that are not quite so admirable.

To consider Jephthah a man who practiced *"family values"*, new meaning would have to be given to the term. His mother was a harlot (Judges 11:1), which, of course, was no fault of his, but his treatment of the only child he had has to be one of the most despicable stories in the Bible. As he was preparing to battle the Ammonites, he vowed to Yahweh that if he were successful against them, whatever he first saw upon returning home, he would offer it as a burnt offering to Yahweh. After defeating the Ammonites, his daughter (his only child) came out to greet him when he returned to his house. He was kind enough to allow her two months to *"bewail her virginity"*, after which he *"did with her according to his vow"* (Judges 11:29-40). What father today would consider this man's family values the kind to imitate?

According to a quaint little story in Judges 6-8, Gideon delivered the Israelites from Midianite bondage with an army of

only 300 men, who lapped water like a dog (7:6-7), and then Gideon judged Israel for 40 years, during which time he sired 70 sons with his *"many wives"* and a concubine named Shechem (8:29-30). He hardly seemed the type of father the *Christian Right* would urge men to emulate.

Samson was the famous strong man of Israel, who killed a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:15). Another feat of his was the *"plucking up"* of the gate and gateposts of Gaza, which he then carried away to the top of a mountain, but Sunday school lessons don't mention the fact that he did this after having visited a harlot in Gaza (16:1). After this, he developed a relationship with a beautiful Philistine woman named Delilah with whom he spent a lot of time in her "*chamber*". Although sexual activities between Samson and Delilah were never explicitly stated, they were certainly implied. Bribed by an offer of 1100 pieces of silver from each Philistine lord to betray him, Delilah twice begged Samson to reveal the secret of his strength, and both times he lied to her about its source. Each time, Delilah then betrayed her intentions by binding him in the manner Samson had described in his lies. If stupidity were a family value, then Samson would easily qualify as the all time hero of family values, because after twice seeing Delilah's real intentions, he foolishly succumbed to her wiles on a third attempt and told her that the real secret of his strength was in his hair. Delilah used this information to subdue him and deliver him to the Philistines

for the money she had been promised. So Samson was a liar who consorted with harlots. If this is the Hebrew writer's idea of a *"hero of faith"*, so be it, and if the Christians want him as an example of family values, they're welcome to him.

David was a *man after Yahweh's own heart* (1 Sam. 13:14: Acts 13:22), so what better way to conclude this discussion of biblical family values than with the legacy that David left? Like many other heroes of faith, David practiced polygamy but apparently wasn't satisfied with the sexual diversity to be found in having at least six wives (2 Sam. 3:2-5), for after becoming undisputed king over a united Israel, he demanded that Saul's daughter Michal be given to him as another wife. Before the rift developed between Saul and David, Saul had promised Michal to David for the foreskins of 200 Philistines, whom David then went out and killed in order to pay the dowry Saul had demanded (1 Sam. 18:27). By the time David had become king, Michal had married a man named Paltiel, but this didn't deter David from claiming her as another wife. Michal was taken by force from her husband, who followed along behind her weeping, until Abner (David's agent) turned and ordered him to return home (2 Sam. 3:12-16). How's that as an example of how to hold a family together with good old-fashioned biblical moral values? But such a display of petty vanity should only be expected from a *man after Yahweh's own heart*? Surely, when Christian men today are looking for role models in family values, David has to be far

down on their list.

David, who now had at least seven wives, still wasn't satisfied, for one day when he saw from the roof of his house Bathsheba, the wife of a soldier in his army, bathing, he sent messengers to take her and bring her to his house. The result was an embarrassing pregnancy, which David tried to pin on Bathsheba's husband Uriah by calling him home on furlough to spend some time with his wife, but when Uriah refused to enjoy the pleasures of a conjugal visit while his unit was fighting a war, David sent him back with a letter to his commanding officer to put Uriah in a dangerous battle position and then withdraw from him so that he would be killed. When these orders were executed and Uriah was dead, David then took Bathsheba to be his eighth wife.

David ruled Israel for 40 years (2 Sam. 5:4) as did also Saul (Acts 13:21), since 40 seemed to be a good round number in those days. When he was *"old and stricken in years"*, he was covered with clothes but could not be warmed (1 Kings 1:1), and so his servants suggested that a *"young virgin"* be brought to the king so that she could *"cherish him"* and *"lie in [his] bosom"* to keep him warm. They then searched for *"a fair damsel throughout* all *the borders of Israel and found Abishag the Shunammite and brought her to David"* (1:3). No explanation was given for why the servants were so picky-picky and why the damsel had to be a fair one if her duty was just going to be keeping the king warm, but, anyway, Abishag was selected; she

was "fair," and she cherished the king and ministered to him, *but the king knew her not* (1:4). Nothing is said about whether the king wanted to *know* her but was prevented from doing so by reason of his age and health. At any rate, this is how David, *the man after Yahweh's own heart*, spent his final days. It's enough to make skeptics also yearn for a return to the family values of biblical times.

Part 5

By request, the series on biblical family values is being extended another issue so that we can look at what the New Testament teaches us on the subject by both example and decree. For some reason, Christians seem to believe that Old Testament accounts of atrocious conduct on the part of God and famous biblical characters are unimportant, because, after all, those things were written in the Old Testament and not the New, as if the two testaments are not inextricably bound together in the traditional Christian claim that everything in the Old Testament happened to lead the way to God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Christianity, then, must be held accountable for the god and biblical heroes in whom their own religion is firmly rooted. Christians can't just wave aside matters like those noted in previous articles in this series by saying, *"Oh, well, that was in the Old Testament."*

Even if they could evade the problem that easily, they would still have to explain why so-called family values don't fare much

better in the New Testament. One would think, for example, that if proper family values could be found anywhere in the New Testament they would be evident in the conduct of Jesus himself and the couple whom God chose to be the earthly parents of his only begotten son, but such is not the case. In Luke 2:41-49, we read a story that certainly doesn't present Joseph and Mary as exemplary parents. When Jesus was 12, the family traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the Passover, and when it was over, his parents were returning home and had gone *"a day's journey"* before they noticed that Jesus was not in the company they were traveling in. It's hard to imagine how responsible parents could travel for an entire day and not know that their minor child had been left behind in the city they had visited. Ordinarily, a couple doing this would be considered *parentally negligent*, but if the couple should be the ones whom God chose as the parents of his son, that apparently made it all right, because the inspired writer said nothing critical about the favored couple.

This little yarn concludes with the claim that after Jesus was found by his parents, he returned to Nazareth with them and "was subject to them" (v:51). He may have been "subject" to his parents, but he wasn't always polite to them. According to John, the first miracle that Jesus performed was at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. When the wine ran out, Mary went to Jesus and said, "They have no wine," and in response, her perfect son said,

*"**Woman**, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come"* (4:1-4) A man today who would speak in this manner to his mother would be considered disrespectful, and rightly so, but maybe Jesus in his omniscient wisdom thought that once a man had reached adulthood, he was no longer obligated to be polite to his mother. If so, most men today would disagree.

The incident at Cana wasn't an isolated one. On an occasion when Jesus was speaking to a crowd, he was told that his mother and brothers "stood without, seeking to speak to him." When he was told this, Jesus said, *"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"* He then gestured at his disciples and said, *"Here are my mother and my brothers, because whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"* (Matt. 12: 46-50). A lot of preachers see noble concepts of brotherhood in this statement, but it is just as easy to see flagrant disrespect for close family relationships.

Telling the truth is a recognized family value, but the son of God (Jesus) wasn't above lying to his family. Once when the feast of tabernacles was "at hand," his brothers, who presumably didn't yet believe in him, challenged Jesus to go to Jerusalem and prove himself by doing his signs openly. Jesus then said to them, *"My time has not yet come, but your time is always here... Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet come"* (John 7:6-8). His brothers then left for the festival, and after they were gone, Jesus *"also went, not publicly but as it*

were in secret" (v: 10). It's hard to see lying as a family value, but what else could this be called? At the very least, it has to be considered deliberate deception. Is that a value that families today should emulate?

In his personal relations with his family, Jesus demonstrated an attitude that is hardly commendable, but in his public teachings, he fared even worse. This is the man who said, *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matt. 10:37). He even said that anyone who came to him and did not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters could not be his disciple (Luke 14:26). Jesus taught his followers to demonstrate a cultist fanaticism toward him, which, if actually practiced, would destroy not just family values but the family institution itself.

On another occasion when a disciple asked leave to go bury his father, Jesus said to him, *"Let the dead bury the dead"* (Luke 9:60), and when another one told Jesus he would follow him but first wanted to "bid farewell" to them that were in his house, Jesus said, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God"* (vs: 61-62). Jesus showed

little interest in family relationships and demanded that his disciples do the same. It's hard to see in this man's teachings much of anything that could be considered "*family values*". If parents today should practice the family values that Jesus taught, they would save no money for tomorrow (Matt. 6:19-20) and apparently show no interest in providing for the needs of their families. They would not worry about what they would eat or drink or wear (Matt. 7:25-31), and in so doing would lead their families into poverty and even total destitution. If people today should make a serious attempt to follow the teachings of Jesus, the family institution would be destroyed, yet the *Christian Right* keeps demanding that our government force upon the nation a return to *"biblical family values"*. We can only hope that it never happens.